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# **Institutional narratives and the struggle for inclusive communities in the Greek context**

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## **Abstract**

### **Institutional narratives and the struggle for inclusive communities in the Greek context**

Drawing on research into three case study schools in the Greek context, this paper builds on narrative identity theory to conceptualise the nature of inclusion as part of institutional identity. The voices of head teachers, teachers and parents were analysed as they struggled with policy demands, pupil needs and lack of resources at a time of particular economic uncertainty at local and national levels. The narratives of stakeholders provide a rich account of the complexity of narratives within a web of influences which form divergent institutional stories as teachers and parents grapple with inclusion and inclusive practices. The study identified three forms of inclusion in case study schools: deep, surface and segregated, co-existing to a lesser or greater extent within institutions and their communities.

Keywords: narrative institutional identity; constructing inclusive communities; deep inclusion; surface inclusion; segregated inclusion

## **1. Introduction**

This paper uses a case study approach and narrative identity theory to help conceptualise the complexity of building inclusive school communities within the Greek context. We use narrative identity theory as the basis for the concept of institutional narrative identity to explore the individual and community narratives within each case study institution to identify notions of deep, surface and segregated inclusion. In doing so, this paper contributes insights into how inclusive communities are constructed, challenged and negotiated in this national setting.

### ***Narrative identity theory and narrative institutional identity***

Narrative identity theory is normally applied to individuals and reflects identity as a dynamic telling and retelling of a sense of self in relation to positionality in the present while drawing on interpretations of past and future selves (Hamilton, 2013; 2015).

Aspects influencing this kind of narration may include those of family, community, policy, faith etc., but may also link into larger metanarratives such as ‘inclusion’ and ‘egalitarianism’. At any one time, particular narrative strands may hold greater significance but such strands are still part of a larger web of narratives that form multiple stories of self, career, family and the wider world.

If we see an institution as a living organism, capable of change or shifts in focus within a broader narrative of institutional purpose and values we may begin to establish a fluid and dynamic institutional identity (Hamilton, 2001; 2011). As with individual narrative identity, institutions are seen to be part of a narrative web affected by diverse narratives. In mainstream schools, this may involve a system led model of schooling, and associated policies as well as historical stories of ‘school identity.’ Major narratives then involve the stories, decisions and practices of those who participate and interact with and within schools such as pupils, parents, teachers and head teachers. Teachers in particular may interpret or challenge policy and practices which do not fit in with existing internal narratives and may then alter the ways in which schools conceptualise and enact policy imperatives such as inclusion. The institution may become a site of conflict and confusion, as new policy narratives clash with institutional narrative strands such as school purpose and values, and individual narratives reflecting beliefs about schooling and inclusion. Our starting point then, is the idea of an institution as not only the physical structure and resources, but also as a living

and dynamic entity affected by the relationships and beliefs of its inhabitants as well as by the external eddies of policy and community.

The perceived permeable boundaries of the school and its contextual narratives, reflect influences moving across different narrative levels from macro to micro. Some influences such as policy may be limited and we may find that some boundaries become less permeable within particular levels e.g. where policy rhetoric is heard within the school but little happens beyond this acknowledgement. Here the narrative web becomes even more complex as institutions comprise both official narratives as well as the more dynamic and perhaps more conflicting individual narratives shaping the lived worlds of participants.

### ***Institutional narrative identity and inclusion***

In considering institutional narrative identity and inclusion, we suggest that there is a need to reflect on institutional narratives of character and history, the shifting community ethos, values and actions as well as narratives of purpose and segregation. At the heart of such narratives will be that of leadership and the power dynamics involved in relationships and the implicit theories of individuals (Sternberg, 1990; Hamilton, 2009) as inclusion is manifested or challenged openly or implicitly in lived experiences. The narratives of community are vital, especially those of parents, where, in the Greek setting, unemployment, poverty and lack of agency, as well as local history and current demographics characterize important aspects of the broader school community. These narrative layers are then mediated by individual narratives of head teachers, teachers, pupils and parents and community narratives of poverty and lack of social justice. In Figure 1, the various key narrative strands and inclusion are outlined.



Figure 1. *Institutional Narrative identity and inclusion*

### ***Inclusion and the Greek context***

Inclusion is evident within global educational debates around a set of international policies regarding the access to and participation in mainstreaming, redefining the concept of integration in educational discourses (Evans & Lunt, 2002). In this definition students with SEN are valued for who they are because of – and not despite – difference, providing them with the opportunity to participate and become actively involved in their school community (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Farrell et al., 2007). Special Educational Needs<sup>1</sup> (SEN) students, are regarded positively with a valid identity rather than as possessing a pathological condition (Slee, 2013). The global community has renewed its interest in human rights, equity and inclusion driving educational reforms worldwide (Barton, 1999; Florian, 2008).

The global commitment to and definition of inclusion, from a human rights perspective, was explicit in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 2015), acknowledging such diversity and the need to accommodate it within mainstream schools. This was aligned with the growing consensus of inclusion as a universal goal and policy responses to inclusion are evident in Europe (European Agency for the Development of Special Needs Education, 2010) and elsewhere. This was supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (United Nations 2007) that demanded that state parties develop and sustain an inclusive education system at all levels.

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<sup>1</sup> The term SEN is considered by the main author to best reflect the terminology used in Greece.

Greece, with several other countries, countersigned the above statements, and it now has a national commitment to move towards the implementation of inclusive practices through educational reforms related to the ethos of schools and educational policies, supporting students with disabilities and addressing any discrimination (Angelides, 2008). However, although consensus is possible in international values underpinning inclusion, there is no single perspective on inclusion within one national state or even at school level, as inclusion can be defined in a range of ways (Clough & Corbett, 2000, Liasidou, 2015). According to Fulcher (1989) the different discourses and language(s) of inclusion are context-dependent, as well as the aims of the different groups within it. The vagueness around the meaning of the term is reflected in practice as Avramidis et al., (2002) observed: "inclusion is a bewildering concept which can have a variety of interpretations and applications" (p. 158). Corbett and Slee suggest that inclusion is experienced as a process located within the cultures, policies and practices of the whole school (Corbett & Slee, 2000). In utilizing institutional narrative identity as a conceptual frame, the present study captures the multiple facets of school cultures, mediated by policies and shifting practices especially when schools have inclusion policies imposed from above without reference to the individual school and its community..

Building more inclusive communities in schools requires a whole school approach as the "effective change occurs when it happens from within" (Hughes & Anderas, 1995, p. 29) and when members' discriminatory conceptualizations, perceptions and practices are acknowledged (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). However, the field remains uncertain as to which key principles and practices are prerequisite to developing inclusive approaches (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Carrington & Robinson, 2007). While a wide range of scholars internationally have provided models of effective



inclusive school communities (see Peters, 2002; Brandon, 2011; Razel, 2013), in the Greek context there is limited research evidence in this regard (Mamas, 2012; Strongilos et al., 2012). Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) in their case studies undertaken in the UK, Portugal and the US, link the construction of inclusive school communities with wider social factors. They identify initial motivation for building inclusive school communities as crucial and maintain that external elements (i.e. policy and the wider social community narratives) are fundamental aspects of the building of inclusion in schools, dealing with the contrasting perceptions of staff and students as resource. From this perspective schooling is a social and political endeavor that may lead to equity and justice, avoiding the reproduction of discrimination and marginalization within schools (Vlachou, 2004).

Inclusion policy has proved to be one of the most contentious policy reforms in Greece and remains very poorly understood in the Greek context (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). In Greece the term "inclusive education" in the Greek policy documentation often translates as "non-exclusion" (Zoniou-Sideri 2004). In practice, this interpretation adopts a similar meaning to the term integration. As a result, special education in Greece is perceived as merely a type of mainstream schooling, and special schools remain sites of fragmentation, discrimination and segregation (ibid). Thus, this narrow view of inclusion is in conflict with the international discourse that conceptualizes inclusion broadly, as a reform that supports and nurtures diversity amongst all learners supported and adopted by scholars (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; UNESCO, 2015).

The question of what renders a flourishing, diverse school community and to what extent students with SEN are fully included in their schools is a concern, as the discrepancies between the rhetoric of inclusion and the actual process of implementation are often marked (Florian, 2011; Hazel & Allen, 2013).

## **2. Research approach**

### ***Context of inclusive education in Greece***

Greece is still at an early stage in the evolution of inclusion. Existing literature and the present study have highlighted the strong cultural, historical and social connections to a medical model of disability and consequently a tendency towards segregated provision in separate organizations or partial segregation within the same institution. Previously, many students with special educational needs might have been educated or cared for at home so that segregated provision is still perceived in Greece to be inclusion in the broadest sense i.e. in terms of basic physical inclusion of SEN students within the state system. Active participation of young people and parents within that system and inclusivity in terms of relationships and collaborations with colleagues, community and policy may be some distance away (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016). Nonetheless, in this research we acknowledge the ways in which these particular schools can be said to reflect or challenge inclusive thinking and practices in their own ways. For each school, we examined each school context and the conceptualisations and practices around inclusion. Ainscow (2007) has argued that in order to understand how inclusion may evolve, it is essential to explore the ways in which inclusion is articulated, the nature of the language used, whether there is a common sense of purpose and commitment to that purpose underpinned by clear values and active social learning and in this study we were keen to delve into the narratives that reflected the struggle for inclusion through the words of key participants. In this study, three case study schools were investigated in order to encourage a greater understanding of these subtle narratives. This was undertaken in a context where inclusive policy was emerging from an authoritarian centre where compliance was expected but little explicit guidance was provided.

### ***Research questions***

While the topic of special and inclusive education has dominated educational discourse and academic research in many countries around the world, in the Greek context, its development and implementation is poorly understood. This is particularly true in secondary education, as evidenced by the lack of prior research. Thus, we were motivated to examine this topic for a number of reasons. Firstly, inclusion is a dynamic construct taking different forms and meanings within different socio-economic, historic, physical and political contexts (Alexander, 2001; Peters, 2002; Mitchell, 2005) raising questions regarding the way it has been constituted within the Greek context. This was particularly important given the introduction of EU-generated policies regarding inclusion. Secondly, we believe that developing a better understanding of inclusion for students with SEN in Greece has been neglected and under-theorised; undermining educational opportunities for these very students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to make a contribution to knowledge “for the sake of knowledge” (Patton, 1987, p. 152), but rather to have an applied function, through generating debate and encouraging action.

The following research questions explore the development and implementation of special and inclusive education policy, and investigate these in light of the multiple approaches in Greece to special educational needs. Significantly, stakeholders’ perceptions and practices at the national, local (community) and school level are examined:

- (1) What are the key policies concerning inclusive education in Greece? What are the main challenges within the policy process?
- (2) What is the nature of conceptualisations regarding SEN and inclusion among some of the stakeholders involved (head teachers, teachers and parents) in three Greek secondary schools in an urban location?
- (3) What are the key influences upon school stakeholders’ decisions about the

implementation of inclusion and the relations constructed within and beyond schools?

This article focuses on the second and third of these questions through reflection on the narrative institutional identity of each case study school and uses the policy documentation as an influential narrative in the building of potentially inclusive communities.

### ***Research design***

Drawing on social constructionism, this study focused on the construction of social phenomena, the acceptance of reality as socially constructed and actively (re)produced by human beliefs, perspectives, actions and relationships (Creswell, 2013). The study was designed and grounded in case studies of three schools. These case studies reflect the complex conceptualisations and contradictions occurring within these schools, especially those without a common language and sense of purpose. Ainscow (2007) highlights the need to consider the ‘deeply held beliefs of individuals’ as a key component in any attempt to challenge or transform practice.

Case study here is the study of a small number of institutions, in order to understand the narrative webs and the significant circumstances of three schools which typify distinct approaches to inclusion within wider Greek policy initiatives (Stake, 1995; 1998). Thus, the three schools were bounded units, each having their own functional regulations and approach towards inclusion influencing and leading their decisions related to school structures; while also being affected by external influences such as the socio-cultural context and international and national policies. These complexities have been captured through the framework of institutional narrative identity. Using three instrumental cases as a means of uncovering distinct aspects of

each school’s narrative web supports case study use as a means of investigating an

aspect of the case rather than trying to capture the case in its entirety (Stake, 1995).

Data collection drew upon multiple sources of qualitative data and information - including thirty-two non-participatory classroom observations, twenty-nine semi-structured interviews with head teachers (three), teachers (seventeen), all with a range of in-service experience and parents (nine), as well as an analysis of policy documents (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). There was a mix of female and male participants. It was hoped that children would be involved as they are considered to be a source of important narratives but school constraints were such that they could not be approached in this instance. A more detailed account, both tabulated and narrative, can be found in Tsakalou (2015).

### ***Choice of cases – school context***

The choice of case schools was driven by the research questions, the parameters of the sample population and literature related to inclusive education in the Greek and international context (Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006). Consequently schools with varied institutional profiles and approaches to inclusion were selected : 1) “*Acropolis*”, a special technical and vocational school where students with both mild and severe needs were educated in a segregated school setting<sup>2</sup> ; 2) “*Parthenon*”, a mainstream-inclusive school that welcomed students with mild SEN and offered partial withdrawal from classrooms to integration units in the school; and 3) “*Caryatids*”, a mainstream non-inclusive school that welcomed students with mild SEN, but offered no official provision or school structures to support them. Each school possessed a unique institutional profile and approach to special education and inclusion. These schools were not selected on the basis of assumed good practice – as in other studies investigating inclusive educational communities – rather because they represented

different legal and policy definitions and approaches to inclusive education. The three schools were selected from all secondary schools that belong to the Department of Education and Special Education in the same region but in different Municipalities near the Greek capital. This meant that one single education policy was applied to all schools. An interest in investigating inclusive practices in secondary schools stemmed from the fact that, until recently, segregated education in special settings was the only official provision for secondary students with SEN (Vlachou, 2006). Secondary schools were the most appropriate site to investigate, as attendance at these school was compulsory for students, both with and without SEN, since 2008. Moreover, integration units are mainly established in *lower* secondary schools, as there is a scarcity of provision for students with SEN in upper secondary school settings. Additionally, there are only lower secondary special and special vocational schools for students with Special Educational Needs. It is of note that the students at technical and vocational special secondary schools included students with a wide age range –and thus they operate as upper secondary schools as well. In these schools, such as “*Acropolis*”, students could gain a technical certificate in order to participate in the labour market. Finally, the secondary education curriculum is challenging and demanding for students with SEN, especially considering its academically-oriented nature and the common use of traditional teaching methods and assessments reliant on rote learning and memorisation of factual information.

### ***Data Collected***

The twenty-nine semi-structured, individual and open-ended interviews took place (after the observations) with head teachers, teachers and parents. Questions arising from observations, also guided the interview process. According to Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), this dual approach to data collection allows for deeper exploration of the topic under consideration. It also enhanced the quality of the conclusions as a fuller and richer story can be captured through triangulation of perspective and of data collection approach.

### ***Analysis***

Qualitative data were drawn from documents, interviews and observations and analysed following the analytical process suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994); which contains three separate components: data reduction; data display; and conclusion drawing and verification. The process of analysis was the same for all the case studies, though all three involved an initial holistic approach to analysis: reading through field notes, transcriptions and also translations of raw audio data, then repeated reading of the data, and induced development of codes, categories and themes that emerged in relation to the research questions, using them as a preliminary frame for this process (Richards & Morse, 2012). During this process, patterns emerged, were adjusted and categories were collapsed, or separated further, before the final themes were identified (Coe et al., 2017).

### ***Cross-case analysis***

Individual cases were then analysed further using cross-case analysis in order to find relationships or differences amongst them. This approach involved refining common themes and sub-themes within cases. Although each case was unique, the purpose of this cross case analysis was to compare and contrast the key themes of case studies from

*Acropolis, Parthenon* and *Caryatids* schools, to identify possible elements regarding the construction of inclusive school communities in secondary education. This led to the drawing out of themes about school members' understanding and visions of inclusion, their commitment to inclusive values, visions and barriers of inclusion; the nature of decisions made by school members regarding school structure: purposes, school strategies and classroom practices, along with the relations built within and beyond schools.

### **Limitations**

As with any qualitative study, there are limitations because of the focus on a particularity in the form of a case study and the limited number of case studies undertaken. However, we have focused on the ways in which the depth and richness of such studies provide us with data within authentic settings where we anticipate that the following results will encourage the reader to find resonances through the voices and responses of the participants. Stake (1995) argues that such research looks to enhance understanding rather than trying to transform it and that through its resonances, the broader research field can engage fruitfully with the issues and insights gained (Andrew Pollard in interview, Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). We have used these rich data to help conceptualise an innovative means of understanding the complexities, challenges and contradictions provided by diverse narratives within an institutional identity frame.

### **1. Results**

#### ***Surface, deep and segregated inclusion***

Narratives of surface, deep and segregated inclusion were identified in the case study schools. Each school had elements of each narrative presenting sometimes contradictory or competing stories of inclusion and inclusive practice. Although previous studies addressed the process of identifying the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of inclusion in



schools characterized as inclusive – often through organizational arrangements – this study uncovered the complexity of this process and the identification of different versions of ‘inclusion’ in the Greek context. Given the present study sees inclusive education as socially constructed, and considering all the components and preconceptions addressed in previous research, constructing inclusion in schools was found to be a challenging process, especially in a centralised educational system. Indeed, in all the three case schools, elements of inclusive and exclusionary components were found to be present. While these components alone were not sufficient to construct an inclusive community, they formed narrative institutional identities that struggled to engage with inclusive policy and practice.

**Surface inclusion** was characterized by very limited or absent provision for students with SEN in mainstream settings; for example inclusion was acknowledged at the level of policy but any meaningful engagement with the concept was superficial. Surface inclusion here involves conceptualizations of inclusion, often based on a narrow, one-dimensional understanding of special needs. This type is also characterized by a lack of shared commitment to inclusive values on behalf of school stakeholders, and the systematic exclusion of students based mainly on academic criteria. Dysfunctional relationships between school members, and between school members and community members, were found to be prevalent. In this version of inclusion limited collaboration in responsibility, decision-making and problem-solving processes was identified as well as a lack of voice and agency for individuals and groups. In policy documents adopting a surface approach to inclusion, special and inclusive education are seen as both practically and discursively separate from mainstream education. In such a school, inclusion might be perceived as irrelevant or impractical. However, because of the myriad stories existing within each school, there may be aspects that reflect surface notions of inclusion but may

also reflect other forms such as deep and segregated narrative strands of inclusion.

Inclusion is part of the story of schooling in this context in a superficial form, but only insofar as it is acknowledged as policy but rejected for pupil involvement. The lack of agency for any of the individuals involved, as well as the lack of discussion and collaboration reinforces that there are few if any pathways available for change to occur.

**Segregated inclusion** is characterized by segregated provision and limited physical accommodation for students with SEN in mainstream settings. It involves conflicting conceptualizations of inclusion, and – like surface inclusion – is based upon a narrow, one-dimensional understanding of special needs. In this approach, behavioural problems and poor academic achievement tend to be conflated with special needs, where inclusion is often perceived as a means of punishment or remedial support. School stakeholders adopting a segregated approach tend to adopt a narrow consensus on inclusion rather than a shared understanding of inclusive values and purposes. Decisions about structures primarily address physical relocation and minor pedagogic adaptations, largely through the introduction of integration units. While this approach involves some collaboration between school staff, few opportunities are extended to parents in decision-making and problem-solving processes. Individual initiatives for agency exist, but are not prevalent.

**Deep inclusion** is characterized by full academic and social provision for students with SEN in mainstream system settings. It involves positive perceptions of inclusion, shared understanding and commitment to inclusive values – including diversity, equality, and social justice – and a strong belief that inclusion is a universal right. In this approach, both mainstream and special needs students are encouraged to engage inside and outside the school, and academic initiatives are balanced with social purposes. Collaborative activities are common, functional relationships between school stakeholders are prevalent, and all participate equally in decision-making and problem-

solving processes. A dynamic voice and strong agency for change, both within and beyond the school community, are exhibited by school members.

Within case study schools, evidence of partial engagement with all three kinds of inclusive practice, processes and relationships existed; indeed, all schools shared complex and at times contradictory profiles of inclusion. For example, Acropolis represented segregated provision via the use of separate physical accommodation and teaching for those deemed to have SEN but was nonetheless ahead of local mainstream schools in its efforts to include students with SEN within the education system. Mrs. Pavlou, the head teacher, was a powerful advocate for inclusivity within this segregated

setting, but lacked support for distributed leadership and collaborative decision-making. Understanding the nature of these contexts – and the diverse interconnections and disconnects within them – is fundamental to taking steps forward on an inclusive pathway (see Tsakalou (2015) for a more detailed account).

In particular, findings suggest that while the majority of participants were in favour of an abstract notion of inclusion, most held negative or neutral perceptions of inclusive education in practice. All head teachers agreed that inclusive policy had a positive influence on education; however, frequently this focused on practical concerns such as accessibility. Indeed, significant differences in conceptualizations were detected between the head teachers of the two mainstream schools – Parthenon and Caryatids – and those of the head teacher at Acropolis. Mr. Petrou (Parthenon) and Mr. Kostis (Caryatids) adopted a narrow vision and understanding of inclusion, often aligning the concept with integration (*segregated*). For Mr. Petrou (Parthenon), inclusion was synonymous with remedial support, or viewed as a means of punishment for low-achievers (*surface*). For Mr. Kostis (Caryatids), inclusion was perceived as totally unfeasible in the Greek school reality (*surface*). They both viewed disability as a personal tragedy, arguing that students with SEN are not eligible or suited for education in inclusive settings, a belief strongly underpinned by a medical approach to SEN (*surface*).

In reality, if the mainstream teacher loses time dealing with the difficulties of the students with SEN, this time is stolen from other students without difficulties. So, the problem is in the implementation of inclusive practices within the mainstream class. (Mr. Petrou, head teacher)

For Mr. Kostis (Caryatids), inclusion was perceived as totally unfeasible in the Greek school reality (*surface*) for practical reasons but also because there was no perceived support from the authorities leading to a very narrow sense of what inclusion might be:

It is not fair to sacrifice the one in favour of the many. I just can't leave 25 students and deal with the 26<sup>th</sup>. There is no support and we run out of time. (Mr. Kostis, head teacher)

Mrs. Pavlou (Acropolis) adopted a very different approach to inclusion, however. She expressed a strong commitment to inclusive values, and a broad vision of inclusion both inside and outside her school's boundaries (*deep*). Unlike her mainstream counterparts, Mrs. Pavlou viewed disability as a socially constructed phenomenon, arguing that SEN students should not be placed on the margins of either school or society.

It is wrong to have 2 categories of children. It is wrong to categorize students. Even if we are not ready to accept inclusive education .....I believe it is so much better for all students if they were in the same school unit. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

She was also the only head teacher to support the existence of an on going and dynamic telling and retelling of the notion of inclusion, with a deep commitment to inclusive values, rejecting the labelling of students in an attempt to minimize the deficit- based public narrative about her school (*deep*) but in a segregated environment within the system.

Today, the only goal of Greek education is students' entrance to higher education and nothing else. We as teachers don't let students understand how they can be in the society or what they should ask for. This is not students' with disabilities fault that they need to get high grades just to pass their exams and enter a university, but this is all wrong. (Mrs. Pavlou, head teacher)

Most teachers and parents reflected the attitude(s) of their respective head teachers, perceiving inclusion as merely physical relocation and additional academic practice out of the mainstream class (Florian & Hawking, 2011). Teachers and parents at Caryatids interpreted inclusion as an educational innovation underpinned by humanistic values, but also viewed it as unfeasible due to a lack of financial and material resources.

I am not interested in the way things are. I believe it takes special knowledge, moral and ethical strength for someone to be able to do that. I do not know anything about the law or the possible outcomes from the implementation of inclusion. (Konstantina, Maths teacher, Caryatids school)

Acropolis teachers, on the other hand, shared non-committal perceptions of inclusion, still questioning both its feasibility and eligibility criteria (*segregated*).

It is good to promote inclusive schooling but under circumstances and conditions, involving also students with no great cognitive differences between them. (Molly, Literature teacher, Acropolis school)

The inclusive education scenario is extremely optimistic. I think that there is no right for students with severe SEN themselves to be included, they could be socially included through other ways, as here in *Acropolis*. (Andrea, Literature teacher, Acropolis school)

Parthenon teachers accommodated the addition of integration units into their definitional boundaries of being an inclusive school, but didn't make many other significant conceptual alterations (*surface*).

Students without SEN cope with students attending integration units very well. Both of them call it – the integration unit – a 'special class'. For them it seems to be a private tutorial or a *frontistirio*. However, a few times lately I'm listening to students with SEN stating that they are going to attend the integration unit; mostly they informed me that they must leave to attend *frontistirio* with the other teacher or they have been in their private tutorials in Maths. Occasionally students ask how they can attend integration units as they feel that they have difficulties in Maths. (Stella, Maths teacher, Parthenon school)

As integration units happen during core courses, students withdraw from courses such as physical education, music and arts which are considered by the educational system and the school to be minor courses. In my opinion they should attend these courses as they come to the unit very disappointed and unmotivated because they miss interesting courses. (Katerina, special Literature teacher, Parthenon school)

Thus, even in the same school, different perceptions and levels of commitment to inclusive values existed, indicating the presence of both *deep, segregated or surface* inclusion. Nusbaum (2013), also found that mainstream teachers in an elementary school with a special class for students with disabilities, attached variable and elastic meanings to the concept of inclusion, lacking awareness that segregating students in this way legitimizes exclusion. These findings appear to reinforce the fragmentation of inclusion given different viewpoints, and the tendency then towards exclusionary practices. Indeed, according to Blair (2002) and Angelides et al. (2012), an inclusive

philosophy must be adopted by all school actors for inclusive change to occur, as exclusion often results when restricted perceptions are present (Ainscow, 2005).

Teachers and parents stressed the challenge of teaching students with different educational and cognitive levels in the same mainstream class, again mirroring the perceptions of Mr. Petrou and Mr. Kostis.

If in *Caryatis* some students are not able to follow the curriculum, they have to be somewhere else, in another educational setting where they could acquire some basic skills in order to access vocational rehabilitation. So the students who are willing and can continue their education further will enter university faculties... for the others, as it is not necessary for all to go to the University, including students with SEN, they could have the support of specialised teachers and develop other talents and abilities. (Penelope, Literature teacher, Caryatis school).

The inclusive education scenario is extremely optimistic. I think that there is no right for students with severe SEN themselves to be included, they could be socially included through other ways, as here in *Acropolis*, why should we put them through that torture? (Katie, parent, Parthenon school)

In particular, special teachers at Parthenon reported that their mainstream colleagues held narrow understandings of integration units, perceiving them as either punishment or a 'quick fix' for underachievement (*surface*).

Here, in the integration unit mainstream teachers are not being made aware of the reason for SEN students' attendance, as they see the unit as a way of escaping from the core course in class. They do not understand the meaning of the integration unit. (Vassilis, Literature teacher, Caryatis school)

Similarly Munn and Lloyd (2005), found that most teachers have a narrow understanding and view of students with difficulties, despite the great need these students have for others to understand their individual circumstances. A recent study conducted by Coutsocostas & Alborz (2010) in a northern region of Greece, found that 47.5% of 600 secondary teachers rejected the practice of full inclusion, while 79.5% expressed doubts about the feasibility of inclusive practices for all students (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). This may be due to limited pre-service and in-service training in special education for mainstream teachers in Greece.

Indeed, Koutrouba et al. (2008) found that a lack of knowledge of special needs resulted in teachers' reluctance to accept inclusion, increased negative feelings, and produced more restricted conceptualizations. Ainscow (2007), however, suggests that it is not about specialised teaching but rather effective teaching for individual needs, as a lack of training is often seen as a barrier but perhaps represents an unnecessary fear. According to Symeonidou and Phtiaka (2014), in their recent study with Greek-Cypriot teachers exploring their understanding of inclusion, found that teachers' initial education and training does not guarantee a shared understanding of inclusive education, as secondary teachers were found to be unfamiliar with the concept of differentiation. This negativity likely derives from both a lack of training and a failure to include teachers in the change process, limiting their ability to take ownership of inclusive reform. For example, stakeholders at the three schools surveyed in this study were found to have different initial education and training, which ultimately was reflected in their conceptualizations, purposes and teaching practices. It is of note that none of the head teacher and teacher participants in the present study had taken part in an in-service training programme in inclusive education, as they depended on personal initiative rather than it being mandatory professional education (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2014). Indeed, despite a socio-ethical discourse underpinning the discussion of inclusion in Greece, this study revealed that participants were firmly enculturated in a model of integration (*segregated*), particularly with regard to categorizations of SEN and students' placement. This could be partially explained by the vague articulation of inclusion in policy documents, while Ainscow's (2005) argument about the clarity of the definition tracking it back to the central national policy texts highlights the need for common language, understanding and consequently a common purpose when trying to bring about this kind of change.

The concept of relationships and collaboration, both within and between school members, schools, authorities and communities, is stressed as a key component of



inclusive education within multiple frameworks, highlighting their significance (Busher, 2005; Ainscow et al., 2012; Hazel & Allan, 2013). Ainscow (2012) argues that a shared understanding of the purpose of inclusive education, as well as the consistent use of language, is significant according to a series of studies conducted by the author and his colleagues (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010); this does not require the introduction of new techniques, but rather involves collaboration within and between schools, collaboration between schools and communities, networking across contexts and the collection and use of contextually relevant evidence. These strategies should be underpinned by a new way of thinking, away from explanations of educational failure that focus on the characteristics of individual students and their families, towards the barrier and challenges to participation and learning experienced by students in different educational systems (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). In the case study schools, it was noticeable that there was a lack of collaborative working and thinking and relationships were hierarchical with the head teacher at the apex.

### **3. Discussion**

According to Clark et al. (1999, p.173), 'instead of examining schools to see whether they are or are not inclusive, we should focus on understanding the processes of inclusion and exclusion which operate in all schools.' One substantive finding that emerged was the importance of conceptualizations of inclusion, decisions about structures, and relationships between school stakeholders in this process. While inclusive communities were promoted rhetorically both within and out-with schools, they were not met with requisite levels of commitment to inclusive values, shared conceptualizations and understandings of inclusion, and active participation by all school members. Although previous research has indicated that collaborative relationships form the basis of inclusive reform efforts, encouraging shared ownership of decision-making and problem solving (Curcic et al., 2011), the present study

identified asymmetrical power relationships, individual efforts but little collaboration, and limited shared ownership for inclusive change within these Greek schools. This likely results from the absence of a common inclusive vision and commitment in schools (Hazel & Allen, 2013) more generally, leading to sometimes clashing ideas within an individual school. A possible remedy exists, however, in the form of enhanced communication and collaboration within and between schools, as well as the establishment of clear purposes and roles for school stakeholders. Ultimately this will require increased awareness of disability, inclusion, and professional responsibilities. Indeed, we contend that much discontent amongst school members resulted from a lack of role clarification, shared ownership, and misinterpretation of boundaries.

Head teachers' conceptualizations and understanding of inclusion, as well as their commitment to inclusive values, were heavily influenced by the central educational authorities, inclusive policy, and the politics of educational change. Indeed, it has been noted that there are misconceptions and misinterpretations about inclusion within policies, leading to a lack of shared meaning and understanding from the beginning (Liasidou, 2015). In turn, these conceptualizations were found to play a key role in the construction of inclusive communities, as they echoed or challenged those expressed by teachers and parents. This confirms the findings of O'Rourke (1980), who stressed that head teachers' perceptions set the tone for the development of a school's overall approach, vision and commitment to inclusion.

The findings related to inclusive leadership and teacher and parent voice and agency will be the focus of a different paper, however, it is important to note here that although in *Acropolis* the head teacher had a clear and broad vision of social inclusion, teachers still remained comparatively inactive regarding its implementation. Indeed, the special teachers who worked in *Acropolis* were found to be focused almost exclusively on social inclusion without offering practical academic initiatives in that educational setting, complying with the state regulations. Additionally, the lack of clear communication from Mrs Pavlou highlighted her limited vision as an agent for change with teachers, excluding them from sharing her goal to prioritize social school purposes and equal learning opportunities for all.

However, the scope for such confusion, is not perhaps unexpected as in imitating and borrowing policy from the EU, the Greek government has introduced terminology and concepts from elsewhere in the European Union through a process of "policy-borrowing" (Halpin & Troyna, 1995; Eurydice, 2004; Mavrou & Symeonidou, 2014), without taking context-specific factors that affect processes of policy formulation and implementation

into consideration. This has produced contradictory perceptions and policies, as new legislation has attempted to promote diversity and inclusivity in a society and educational system that is unprepared for such deep change (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2014; Fryssa et al., 2014). It is noteworthy that the philosophical discourse and the sense of inclusive schooling as a social and political venture, underpinning special and inclusive education in other contexts, is largely absent from Greek policy (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2006; Liasidou, 2011). What constitutes special needs, diversity and inclusion is constructed socially and historically, and is often embedded in financial and political relations of inequality. In the Greek educational policy context, difference is perceived as inferiority and, accordingly, ‘others’ are frequently excluded and ignored.

For the Greek education system, the development of different strands of training for inclusive/special education of teachers, the lack of a shared responsibility for SEN students in the mainstream classrooms, the recent implementation of inclusive policy where the conceptualisation of inclusion as physical relocation has been replaced by changing traditional educational structures, and the norms of a society with an exclusionary ethos towards diversity, along with a strictly academic educational system have been found to have a significant influence upon the perceptions of teachers’ ambivalent attitudes towards the notion of inclusion.

Uncertainty about the meaning of inclusion in policy documents also contributed to a lack of a shared understanding amongst stakeholders (Fullan, 2001). Due to the impermeable nature of the national education policy system, head teachers, teachers and parents were prevented from participating in the policy-making process at any level, compounding implementation challenges. This unidirectional, hierarchical structure was also found in schools, as head teachers strongly influenced teachers and parents, but were less influenced by these constituencies themselves. Indeed, the three head teachers

in this study were found to serve as the primary decision makers about inclusive values, structures, and policies within their schools. Elements of surface, segregated and deep inclusion were easily traced to the decisions made by head teachers, but also to the conceptualizations of teachers and parents, making the construction of an inclusive school community even more challenging. As these findings clearly indicate, there was no emphasis within case schools on either collective action or decision-making, resulting in the disempowerment of teachers, special teachers and parents. According to Rice (2006) and Carrington and Robinson (2006), these dynamics are a barrier to the construction of inclusive school. Indeed this was an important implication of this study (along with the need for a more decentralised system which can support different types of schools), that educational policy making in Greece should aspire to be collaborative by including head teachers in decision-making communities, as school members should share participation in leadership, dialogue, and responsibilities.

In this study, while some schools may aspire to deep inclusion within their narrative institutional identities, it is also suggested that inclusion may be dynamic and multifaceted within its context—containing at times elements of all three forms of inclusion – surface, deep and segregated. Any one institution may present a dominant deep narrative of inclusion but may also present elements of surface or segregated inclusion, making for a very mixed experience for young people. Narratives were challenged or reinforced within and across the narrative web of each case study school. This raises questions over whether deep inclusion is possible across all elements of school narratives or if it may only be possible to minimize the dissonance across these key elements. It may be too idealistic to hope for harmony of purpose although Ainscow et al. (2012) challenges this pragmatic approach suggesting that narratives might be harmonized if schools and communities acknowledge their starting points and attempt to build common narratives and purposes.

Peters (2002) argues that when inclusion is approached through a socio-political value it requires that people not only reform education practice, but that they do so with a deep understanding of why these reforms are necessary, meaning that attention to school culture is key in implementing inclusive education in practice (Peters, 2002). Shared values about inclusion, shared understandings about inclusion among school members, shared vision and shared commitment to these inclusive values have been found to be the key components in order to construct inclusion (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004; Curcic et al., 2011). However, such is the complexity of the narrative web of each case study school, that a consensus could not be achieved. Instead, narratives reflected beliefs and practices representing very different forms of inclusion. These dissonant narratives of surface, deep and segregated inclusion suggest that the shared understanding of and engagement with inclusion proposed by Ainscow et al. (2012) is unlikely to be achieved at this time in the Greek context.

Using narrative institutional identity to understand the complexities of constructing inclusive communities brings into sharp relief the dynamic, contradictory and multifaceted narrative strands within schools that were in turn influenced by individual, group and policy narratives. This leads us to the conclusion that **Deep** inclusion may be aspirational but often elusive as a coherent and consistent institutional narrative identity. Any attempt to build inclusive communities in particular contexts must engage with the complex narratives of the narrative institutional identities of schools and their communities, understanding that fragmented conceptualisations and a lack of collaboration and collegiate working will need to be addressed in order to facilitate and support positive inclusive change.

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